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APPENDIX

Ask the JavaScript Pro 10-Minute Solutions

Speak to Your International Users

By Boris Feldman



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As the Web becomes more of a worldwide phenomenon, your site is more likely to get visitors from all over the globe. Wouldn't it be great if you could speak to those international users in their own language? Now, using additional properties exposed by the latest versions of Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer, you can.

Navigator 4.0 and above adds a new `navigator.language` property. This read-only property is a two-letter code that corresponds to the browser's default language. The codes conform to the international ISO 639 standard. The code "en" designates English. You can find a listing of the other codes at <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/lex/iso639.html>.

Microsoft Internet Explorer 4.0 and later, on the other hand, adds three new read-only language-related properties: `browserLanguage`, `systemLanguage`, and `userLanguage`. These properties refer to the default language of the browser application, the language of the operating system, and the current user's Control Panel "Regional Settings" selection, respectively. Your best bet of the three is to use the `userLanguage` property, as that's the most likely to reflect the user's language preference. All three properties also provide language information in the form of a letter code. However, Microsoft's approach is to provide a two-letter code followed optionally by a dash and second two-letter modifier. The first part of the code is always present and, like Navigator, seems to use the ISO 639 standard. The optional two-letter modifier gives more information that can help nail down a user's locale. For example, the Microsoft code for U.S. English is "en-us" while the code for U.K. English is "en-uk". This information would help if you were interested in spelling the word color (versus colour) correctly. You can find a complete listing of the codes used by Internet Explorer at http://msdn.microsoft.com/workshop/author/dhtml/reference/language_

You can now streamline the job of making sure that users get content in their preferred language, if available. Unfortunately, though, the hardest part of the internationalization process, translating your content, is one step with which JavaScript won't

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be much help. Once you get over that hump, just follow these easy steps. First, copy the JavaScript code from the sample to your page. Next, modify the values of the langCode and langURL arrays to list the language codes, in ISO 639 format, for which you have custom content and the URLs of that content, respectively. For example, the sample shows you how to configure the two arrays if you have special content in French and Russian. In this case, users with those language settings would automatically be redirected to french.html or russian.html. Any valid URL that would work in an HREF tag will work here, but just make sure that the URLs in this array (langURL) are listed in the same order as the language codes in the langCode array:

```
var langCode = new Array("fr", "ru");
var langURL = new Array("french.html", "russian.html");
```

You can also specify a default URL to go to for users whose language isn't English and isn't specifically named in the langCode array. Just modify the value of the defaultIntlURL variable:

```
var defaultIntlURL = "intl.html";
```

Optionally, you can also leave this variable blank, in which case the code will do nothing unless you've specifically named the language in the langCode array:

```
var defaultIntlURL = "";
```

That's it. You're ready to go worldwide. Now all you need is the content.

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